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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the readiness of student affairs professionals to utilize adult development knowledge in everyday interactions with college students. Four types of knowledge about the adult development process (cognitive-developmental, psychosocial, person-environment interaction, and humanistic-existential) are briefly defined, with references cited for further reading. A discussion of the author's presumptions or judgments about the usefulness of adult devlopment knowledge, using commonly held criteria for evaluating theory (explanatory power, parsimony, comprehensiveness, simplicity, assessment of development, and compatibility with students), is presented. Evidence supporting the author's judgments of usefulness in practice is given in the text, while the actual judgment values, low or high, are given in Table 1. A discussion of the author's presumptions about practitioner readiness to use this knowledge in student affairs is also presented, focusing on attitudes, willingness, desire to improve, depth of knowledge, measurement competencies, resources, professional time, and time frames for development. Evidence in support of each presumption or judgment is provided and the judgment values are given in Table 2. A case study, focusing on a year-long orientation program for college freshmen is presented to illustrate the concept of developmental programming. Stages in model development, including theory exploration, question formation, measurement instruments, objectives, and intervention, are discussed. The paper concludes with comments on the profession's readiness and issues for further analysis. (BL)

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ARE WE READY TO APPLY ADULT DEVELOPMENT KNOWLEDGE IN STUDENT AFFAIRS?

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ARE WE READY TO APPLY ADULT DEVELOPMENT KNOWLEDGE IN STUDENT AFFAIRS?

Any participant in the student affairs profession, and probably most serious observers of it, likely would conclude that development of students is an objective of the profession superior to all others. It appears to be so partly because so much is said of it. The language in the professional journals, from the convention podium, in college mission or purpose statements, or in dialogue between colleagues serves as a compelling reminder.

Was it always so? Was development of students the objective of professional behavior during the Colonial period, for example? Perhaps so. Even with the absence of professionals functioning explicitly in student affairs, a case could be made that teachers acted in such manner to promote well-rounded growth in students. Most likely, at least one thing was different. I doubt that identity and intimacy resolution issues, or moral and ethical reasoning as we understand them today were terms in common usage even fifty years ago. The language of development is a fairly recent companion to professional practice in student affairs.

Another indicator of the importance of development in our work can be seen in our title changes. Deans of students are becoming deans of student development, for example. Or even directors of student activities may assume the title of director of student development. It clearly is the thing to do if one is to be contemporary (or is it faddish?).

The problem is that the language of the profession, the titles of professionals, and even certain public statements like institutional mission or purpose, are only indicators or manifestations of professional concern. They are not synonymous with descriptions of actual professional activities displaying evidence of cause and effect relationships between professional action and change in students.

Likewise, the existence in the literature of knowledge of development, at whatever level of parsimony or comprehensiveness, is not synonymous with ability to use it. For example, some of our knowledge of college student development has been in the literature for years with little to no evidence of its use by practitioners. Now it is fashionable to try to do so, but the realities of applying the knowledge may be much more foreboding than practitioners would like.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss in some detail the presumed readiness of practitioners in student affairs to apply extant knowledge of adult development on college campuses today. This application will be called developmental programming, meaning the intentional effort through programs for college students to change them along some specific dimension as described by theory. The nature and quality of the knowledge of adults will be reviewed also and selected application issues will be highlighted.

What Knowledge?

It takes a broad brush to cover all that is known about or is intended by the phrase adult development knowledge. We can narrow the parameters by limiting concern to what we know of development for conventional populations of college students. At least that delimitation excludes gerontological concerns, and helps define what is meant by adult, but, by itself, does not help define what is meant by development.

For this analysis, at least four types of knowledge of development must be included within our parameters of concern. A fifth type--that dealing with behaviorism--might be included by some, but is excluded here. The four types are briefly summarized below.

Cognitive-developmental theory and research pertains to knowledge of how we think. For our purposes it includes concerns which encompass intellectual, moral, ethical, and ego development. Interested readers or those who require explicit definitions of these terms may wish to refer to Piaget (1952), Kohlberg (1971), Perry (1970), Kitchner & King (1981), and Loevinger (1976).

Psychosocial knowledge includes theory and research focusing more on what we think and the associated behavioral consequences and reflects more clearly our cultural experiences and effects of age and sex. In particular, this knowledge helps to understand stages of growth through the lifespan, periods of transition and

stability, struggles with identity and intimacy, paths to maturity, adaptive patterns in normal living, and qualities of environments which promote development. More information is available in Erikson (1968), Chickering (1969), Heath (1968), Levinson and Associates (1978), Vaillant (1977), and Sanford (1962).

Person-environment interaction knowledge strikes at the very essence of student affairs work insofar as understanding congruence and patterns of cause and effect associated with students responding to and/or shaping their college environments. The student's world presumably is dominated by an environment in which multitudinous interactions occur which promote or hinder learning and/or development. It is a complex, intricate world which, if understood more fully and manipulated more purposefully, might lead to stronger, more positive effects on students. Selected sources to expand this information include Barker (1968), Clark and Trow (1966), Stern (1970), Holland (1973), and Pervin (1960).

Humanistic-existential knowledge refers to concepts to explain development associated with viewing the human being as a unique, self-motivated organism, which, if given an appropriate climate, will strive toward greater health and overall well-being. The theories and correlated research in this type of knowledge of adult development address precisely values and situations involved in teaching, counseling, and advising. More detail is available from Rogers (1961), Maslow (1968), May (1961), Frankl (1959), and Jourard (1971).

In addition to the primary sources cited with each brief description, excellent summaries of these theories and associated research are available in Chickering (1981), Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978), and Rodgers (1980).

Whether practitioners are ready to use this knowledge in everyday practice is the issue to guide the analysis to follow. Due to vast diversity of college environments and to a broad range of professional talent working in those environments, we cannot know precisely each professional's disposition toward the application of human development theory. Nor can we know for certain the efficacy of the knowledge itself for all circumstances of daily student life. On the other hand, certain presumptions, based on experience and knowledge of the author, may support inferences of fact or truth. It is these presumptions about the utility of the knowledge and about practitioner readiness to use it that forms the basis for this analysis.

Presumptions of the Utility of Knowledge

How useful is adult development theoretical knowledge in practical settings? As just described, the knowledge is not of a single type, but it does have a common denominator of explaining aspects of adult behavior hypothetically relevant to the work of college student personnel professionals. Considering certain commonly used criteria for evaluating theory, including explanatory power, parsimony, comprehensiveness, simplicity, assessment of development, and compatibility with students,

selected presumptions or judgments of the author are presented in Table 1 and discussed in this section pertaining to the utility of this knowledge. The evidence in support of each criterion, highlighted in the discussion, leads to judgments as to strength of each criterion and is reflected in Table 2 either as "low" or "high" value as to its usefulness in practice.

Insert Table 1 about here

An accepted risk in this analysis is that utility may vary across different theories for varied application; thus, the analysis will focus on major, general issues associated with the use of theory rather than on specific, technical issues.

A major function of good theory is to explain phenomena. In this case, we need explanations of an almost endless variety of phenomena pertaining to what happens, or should happen, to students in a learning environment. A broad range of forms of development including intellectual, moral and ethical, or ego development issues, psychological phenomena like identity resolution, and effects of congruence between persons and their environments, are explained adequately in the knowledge base. Knowledge of human development theory and research helps to undertand students. It potentially provides a "handle" on the management of very complex processes with very high-level purposes. Even where inadequacies exist in the knowledge, good theory remains helpful to the practitioner.

Parsimonious issues in planning, management, and accountability also are addressed by adult development knowledge. In this instance, then, the knowledge may be used to promote economy in the use of means to an end, or to promote thrift or precision in programming to achieve predictable measurable results. The knowledge is of sufficient quality to allow practitioners to use it to decide what to do, and why, what to expect, and in some cases how to do it. Both parsimony and explanatory power, then, score "high" as indicators of usefulness of human development knowledge.

In contrast to the high marks of broad criteria like explanatory power and parsimony, more focused criteria, including comprehensiveness of theory must be scored lower. Human development theory and research, like most social science theory and research, often is complicated, technical in language and meaning, and, unfortunately, non-comprehensive. A practitioner may wish for a single, powerful and comprehensive theory but none exists as yet. Theories of human development tend to explain specific, precisely defined phenomena. An example may be seen in Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning where explanations of certain intellectual and cognitive processes are explained, but which are not applicable to explanations of all intellectual and cognitive processes. The harsh reality for the practitioner is that to achieve a comprehensive understanding of development, many theories must be known in considerable detail before any theory can be used most effectively.

Like comprehensiveness, simplicity suffers with the present state of knowledge. The highly technical and often complicated nature of the knowledge requires a technical application--the antithesis of simplicity. This criterion, too, must be scored "low."

Perhaps the biggest issue of all regarding the utility of human development knowledge is the assessment problem. Developmental assessment must be conducted from a particular theoretical perspective. Aside from the problems of time, effort, money and competency already discussed under the readiness section, the state of the art of assessment of student development is often too clinical or too technical for practical value. Many elements of theory exist for which no assessment procedures are available. On this standard, the knowledge utility rates "low."

A final presumption from the utility perspective holds that human development knowledge is incomplete, fragmented, and myopic while human beings are none of these things. Clearly, an intelligent, skillful user of the knowledge makes sensible adaptation for the inadequate fit between knowledge about people and people themselves; but, nevertheless, the obvious gap between the nature of knowledge and the nature of people places some limitations on the uses of knowledge.

Presumptions of Practitioner Readiness

The introductory comments highlighting changes in language, titles, and public statements in student affairs serve to suggest

a strong attitude of readiness for the application of adult development knowledge in programming. Thus, attitude is one of eight criteria used to discuss the presumed state of readiness of practitioners. A display of these criteria and the others to be discussed is shown in Table 2. The author's judgment as to the state of readiness for each criteria is indicated on Table 2 also either as "low" or "high" readiness. Obviously, these judgments are, as with those associated with the analysis of knowledge and utility, derived from the evidence discussed in greater detail here. Regarding the attitude of readiness, practitioners appear eager to add selective developmental programs to the range of services/programs/functions already in place. The evidence provided through professional literature shows that many are doing so, though the evidence rarely indicates with much precision what specific knowledge was applied or what development actually occurred in students as a result of the reported efforts.

Insert Table 2 about here

Attitudes of practitioners are related closely to a second criterion--that is, willingness to invest effort to program developmentally--which also is supported by literature of reported efforts, and by convention programs as indicative of a high degree of readiness. If opportunity exists, practitioners seemingly stand ready to act.

Practitioners also desire to improve the precision and the quality of their work and many see the developmental perspective as a better option than the service, or even clinical, perspective so long a hallmark of our profession. Critics, both inside and outside the profession, have long voiced their views that student affairs possesses an amorphous character and is unable to demonstrate any relation between what professionals do and some desirable educational effect in students. The developmental perspective adds hope that association between purpose, effort, and effect can be demonstrated with some precision.

Other standards of readiness as shown in Table 2 are not so positive as attitude, willingness, and desire to improve. For example, few practitioners have studied human development theories beyond a perfunctory understanding, and most are aware of published research on the theories in only a very general way. Furthermore, due to the nature of most preparation programs and the demands of practice, most professionals are not well versed in the knowledge or methods of inquiry associated with root disciplines like psychology and sociology which, in part, provide the foundations for theories of adult development under consideration. Thus, an application of the standard of depth of knowledge possessed by practitioners suggests a lack of readiness. It is impossible to apply what is not known.

Certain psychometric or measurement competencies are required to conduct developmental programming. One of the

qualities of developmental programming which sets it apart from other forms of programming is the compelling requirement first to assess the level of development, or the pre-treatment developmental state, in students and later to determine what change, if any, occurred in the students as a result of the intentional intervention. Two problems arise from this requirement. First, measurement is a technical competency not always developed to an adequate level in many professionals. As with the broader knowledge issue, practitioners often do not know enough or have competencies of sufficient adequacy to perform the tasks required when acting alone. Second, precise measurement of student qualities, even when otherwise possible, takes time, money, and effort not always available to give to programming. Assessment and evaluation frequently are absent from any type of programming, and it is probable that a major reason for the absence stems from basic issues of cost-benefit analysis.

Though wide variations may be found across campuses, generally resources for developmental programming are limited--in some cases, severely so. Fiscal resources on most campuses simply are tied up, either in personnel or support of other essential activities. The costs of developmental programming cannot be denied. It requires personnel time, physical facilities, and money--all of which must be reallocated from present uses. Reallocation of resources calls into question priorities, often forcing rethinking what is essential, and thus affordable, and what is desirable but non-essential, and

sometimes not affordable. Many student personnel operations today simply do not possess the resources to perform additional functions.

A related criterion is professional time. Most conscientious professionals are busy, often to a point of being "spread too thin." Asking, or allowing, such a professional to program developmentally is to confront that person with the question, "Of your present functions, what can be eliminated to enable your involvement in a new function?" It is a difficult question to answer, partially because it assumes the non-essential nature of some functions now being performed. Time is scarce and the state of readiness necessarily must be scored "low" on this criterion.

Finally, it may be presumed that time frames for development to occur in students and for normal college operations to be conducted are incompatible. Most forms of development take considerable time. Change in people seldom occurs "overnight," or in any other very brief time frame. Observable or measurable change may take months, or even years, to become evident. Many student affairs "programs" begin and end in too brief time for demonstrable change in students, even if the intervention forcefully initiates the process of development. Correspondingly, the time necessary for development to occur not only vary significantly among students but rarely fit college operational time frames, such as length of quarters or semesters. Even though the college environment contains potent forces which

promote development, the uniqueness of each person's path to higher stages or levels and the "naturalness" of individual development makes intentional developmental programming frustrating for professionals.

The overall picture drawn from Tables 1 and 2, which summarize the author's presumptions about both practitioner readiness and the utility of adult development knowledge for developmental programming, suggests a confusing answer to the guiding question of this analysis: Are we ready to apply adult development knowledge in student affairs? The judgments reflected in both tables suggest the answer to be: Sometimes, yes. Often, no.

Further analysis is warranted to seek clarification. A discussion of a hypothetical, but perfectly usual, problem in developmental programming will shed more light on the answers.

A Case Perspective

In this hypothetical case, look at the problems of developmental programming through the eyes and minds of a duly constituted committee, composed of appropriate student personnel professionals and representatives from the faculty and administration from a medium-size, public, residential university, who are given the following charge:

> A year-long orientation program is to be planned and executed beginning next fall for one thousand first-time freshmen. It is expected that conventional activities to acquaint the students with each other and

> with the resources and programs of the college will be conducted; however, the focus of the year-long effort is to (a) reduce measured levels of authoritarianism and (b) increase measured levels of intellectualism and maturity.

For this case, unlike the real world, we will consider money and talent to be in plentiful supply to enable us to focus attention on certain more technical aspects of application.

Rodgers and Widick (1980) and Knefelkamp and Wells (1981) discuss alternative models to help in the process of applying knowledge in practice. While much of the discussion to follow is guided by these models, they will not be presented here in detail. Both models call first for identifying a problem with clear parameters suitable for developmental programming, then for describing both the student and the relevant environment from a theoretical perspective.

A theoretical description provides two useful pieces of information. First, it allows us to see the target of concern in the same language as knowledge is described. Second, it forces us to delimit our concerns to one or more elements which will provide the focus of any programming effort.

The orientation example presents some special problems even as we take the first steps toward developmental programming. What is, and how should we describe, an authoritarian personality and dogmatism in students? On this dimension, we are in luck. Sanford (1966) has described the authoritarian personality in

some detail and, fortunately for us, in a context of the typical entering freshman. Certain notable qualities of this personality type include an urge to submit to authority, aggressiveness and/or cynicism, concern with power and toughness, self-censorship, superstition, stereotyped thinking and outlook, rigid conventionalism, a morbid fascination with sex, and a threat complex. Accepting the operational definitions inherent in the available instrument, an assessment device also is available called the F-Scale (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Of special relevance is the observation that most traditional entering freshman may possess some or all of these qualities, none of which are either healthy or productive in a learning climate.

Fortunately, then, guidance from the literature is available to describe the student along one dimension. But what of intellectualism and maturity? They certainly seem reasonable expectations from the college experience, at least when applying a dictionary definition to describe them. Does the literature help to describe them? Yes, indeed it does, but not nearly with the precision of authoritarianism. For example, Heath (1968) provides a fairly comprehensive theory of maturity in college men. Assuming its validity for college women as well, the theory will frustrate our efforts to use it, partly because of its comprehensiveness. It explains maturity along two major dimensions--self-systems, including intellect, values, self-concept, and interpersonal relationship and developmental growth

aspects, including becoming able to symbolize experience, becoming allocentric, becoming progressively integrated, becoming stable, and becoming autonomous. Shall we use all of Heath's theory, or only a part of it? Is it realistic to include so many elements of concern in a practical program? Perhaps we could use only self-concept and becoming progressively integrated as a two-dimensional, but singular slice of maturity.

Now, what of intellectualism? Is it likely the same as the intellectual dimension of the self-system in Heath's formulation or more what Loevinger meant by cognitive complexity? If the former, our operational definition might include concerns for academic aptitude and performance. If the latter, our concerns may appear as a multifaceted formulation of ego development of which cognitive complexity is an integrated part characterized by conceptual complexity, complex patterns of reasoning, high tolerance for ambiguity, ability to perceive broadly and objectivity.

Though still ragged, our theoretical description of the student has begun to take shape. We at least have some guidance as to where to go for more information. The environment, on the other hand, remains undescribed. As can be seen by examining some major theories in person-environment interaction (Barker, 1968; Clark & Trow, 1966; Holland, 1973; Pervin, 1967; Stern, 1970), even definitions of environment are scarce. Is it any and every thing that impinges on students while at college? If so, it may be impossible to describe in a usable way. Perhaps we

could opt to describe selected elements of environment which we believe will have notable effects on our subjects and which we can measure, such as, for example, residence halls, student-faculty relationships, and involvement activities. From literature, we know these elements of environment to be positively associated with several important developmental outcomes.

Assume, then, for our case, Sanford's description of the authoritarian personality (to operationalize authoritarianism), Loevinger's description of cognitive complexity (to operationalize intellectualism), Heath's description of self-concept/integration dimensions (to operationalize maturity), and selected environmental component descriptions as the parameters of concern for treatment. What's next?

From this point, we must select appropriate devices to measure existing levels of development on each of our four major dimensions of concern, remembering, of course, that each of these dimensions contains two or more operational parts which also must be measured. How is our luck holding with regard to available instruments? We probably can use the F-Scale and perhaps Heath's Self-Image Questionnaire or even his Perceived Self-Questionnaire, but we clearly are left with several aspects of concern for which no suitable instrument exists. Even if we decided that Loevinger's Sentence Completion Test was otherwise suitable, no clinical instrument can be feasibly applied with 1,000 subjects in a short period. What remains is a need to

sharply define each element of concern, to operationalize the definitions in terms of aspects of vital importance to our project, and to create our own assessment devices.

A digression from our project to examine the process critically from a practitioner's perspective seems in order. Even assuming adequate knowledge of literature and research and adequate competence in research and evaluation, how many practitioners have the time to devote to a project of this magnitude and complexity? Even if time and other resources were available, is it worth it? Herein lies a dilemma of monumental significance. Few professionals in the field have the time to marshall the necessary resources to accomplish such a task; yet, most professionals would say that it is worth it, if it were possible. Reduced levels of authoritarianism and increased levels of intellectualism and maturity might be seen as a major purpose of all we do in student services. How could it not be worth it?

Returning to the case project, and following roughly the Rodgers and Widick model, our next step involves drafting objectives in measurable terms. To do this now, of course, assumes success in describing our subjects and their environment from acceptable theoretical perspectives, and success in "grounding the theories," or actually assessing present levels of development along each dimension of concern. Objectives optimally should be of two types: (a) those pertaining to content outcomes, and (b) those pertaining to developmental

outcomes. For example, we may wish to promote awareness or knowledge of self (a content objective) and cognitive complexity (a developmental objective). Writing objectives is a specialty unto itself and many perspectives exist as to the best or most appropriate approach.

Regardless of the approach to writing objectives, still another step may need to be taken during this phase, that is, the drafting of researchable hypotheses or questions which, when tested or answered, may contribute to general knowledge of adult development. Developmental programming remains in its infancy and those striving to perfect it may wish to publish their findings for the benefit of the larger profession. Generally, publication outlets prefer empirical evidence discussed in a hypothesis testing context.

From this stage, our hypothetical committee must design the interventions or treatment, select the staff to carry it out, execute the activities, and eventually evaluate the effort. The evaluation should, in part if not totally, rely on change data, that is, how much and what kind of change in students occurred along the dimensions of concern which may be partially or totally associated with the treatments or interventions?

Are We Ready?

In previous sections, readiness among practitioners and utility of knowledge were discussed as presumptions about the question. Next, a case project was discussed which illustrated the viability of the presumptions. Whether we are ready, then,

may depend on one's point of view, one's knowledge and competence, one's setting, and probably countless other factors of equal importance.

While the profession appears ready in many respects and unprepared in many other respects, the question of whether we should be preparing ourselves to apply adult development knowledge was not discussed, beyond a passing comment. From the perspective of this analyst, it appears a proper objective for the profession. To oppose it is tantamount to opposing the very essence of higher learning. Yet there are unanswered questions as to its appropriateness and desirability, such as the ethics of intentional efforts to change others, which may suggest possible conflict with the long-standing, professional principle of self-direction in students. Further analysis of issues in developmental programming beyond readiness and utility clearly are warranted.

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Table 1

Presumptions Regarding the Utility of Theoretical Knowledge of Adult Development in Student Affairs

	Low	High
Explanatory Power	( )	(x)
Parsimony	( )	(x)
Comprehensiveness	(x)	( )
Simplicity	(x)	( )
Assessment of Development	(x)	( )
Compatibility with Students	(x)	( )

Table 2

Presumptions Regarding the State of Practitioner Readiness to Use Adult Development Theoretical Knowledge in Student Affairs

	Low	High
Attitude	( )	(x)
Willingness	( )	(x)
Desire to Improve	( )	(x)
Depth of Knowledge	(x)	( )
Measurement Competencies	(x)	( )
Resources	(x)	( )
Professional Time	(x)	( )
Time Frames for Development	(x)	( )